

Fermented Foods: Dill Pickles¹

United States Department of Agriculture, Extension Service²

Use the following quantities for each gallon capacity of your container.

4 lbs of 4-inch pickling cucumbers

2 tbsp dill seed or 4 to 5 heads fresh or dry dill weed

1/2 cup salt

1/4 cup vinegar (5 percent)

8 cups water and one or more of the following ingredients:

2 cloves garlic (optional)

2 dried red peppers (optional)

2 tsp whole mixed pickling spices (optional)

Procedure: Wash cucumbers. Cut 1/16-inch slice off blossom end and discard. Leave 1/4-inch of stem attached. Place half of dill and spices on bottom of a clean, suitable container. For more information on containers see "Suitable Containers, Covers, and Weights for Fermenting Food," (FCS 8221). Add cucumbers, remaining dill, and spices. Dissolve salt in vinegar and water and pour over cucumbers. Add

suitable cover and weight. Store where temperature is between 70° F and 75° F for about 3 to 4 weeks while fermenting. Temperatures of 55° to 65° F are acceptable, but the fermentation will take 5 to 6 weeks. Avoid temperatures above 80° F, or pickles will become too soft during fermentation. Fermenting pickles cure slowly. Check the container several times a week and promptly remove surface scum or mold.

Caution: If the pickles become soft, slimy, or develop a disagreeable odor, discard them. Fully fermented pickles may be stored in the original container for about 4 to 6 months, provided they are refrigerated and surface scum and molds are removed regularly. Canning fully fermented pickles is a better way to store them. To can them, pour the brine into a pan, heat slowly to a boil, and simmer 5 minutes. Filter brine through paper coffee filters to reduce cloudiness, if desired. Fill jar with pickles and hot brine, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Adjust lids and process as recommended in Table 1, or use the low-temperature pasteurization treatment described below.

The following treatment results in a better product texture but must be carefully managed to

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avoid possible spoilage. Place jars in a canner filled half way with warm (120° to 140° F) water. Then, add hot water to a level 1 inch above jars. Heat the water enough to maintain 180° to 185° F water temperature for 30 minutes. Check with a candy or jelly thermometer to be certain that the water temperature is at least 180° F during the entire 30 minutes. Temperatures higher than 185° F may cause unnecessary softening of pickles.

Table 1.

Table 1. Recommended process time for Dill Pickles in a boiling-water canner.				
		Process Time at Altitudes of		
Style of Pack	Jar Size	0 - 1,000 ft	1,001 - 6,000 ft	Above 6,000 ft
Raw	Pints	10 min	15	20
	Quarts	15	20	25
*After the process is complete, turn off the heat and remove the canner lid. Wait five minutes before removing jars.				